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XIII.—A FRIEND OF CHAUCER'S.

In the *Hous of Fame*, Chaucer mentions amongst harpers "the Bret Glascurion" (v. 1208). This personage was long ago identified¹ with Glasgerion, the hero of a famous ballad; and a further identification of Glascurion with the Welsh bard Geraint (*Y Bardd Glas Keraint*) was made in 1845 by the Rev. Thomas Price.² Professor Child was inclined to accept these identifications, though he expressed himself cautiously.

It requires no argument to show that there is nothing impossible in Chaucer's having heard from a dozen sources the name of so distinguished a person as this Welsh poet. One feels, however, a certain interest in finding a particular Welshman from whom he may perfectly well have got his information. Such a person was Lewis Johan. And even if it be held that Lewis Johan has not this importance as a literary intermediary, he is in any case interesting as a member of Chaucer's circle of city acquaintance. Much light may yet be thrown on the poet's life and environment by the study of just such obscure persons.

Lewis Johan is already known to literary history in a humble way as the person at whose house the sons of Henry IV were taking supper when Henry Scogan read them his moral and poetical address.³ We might infer from this that

¹ By Percy, in the 2d ed. of his *Reliques*, I, lvii (1767).

² See his essay on the *Remains of Ancient Literature in the Welsh, etc.*, published in the *Literary Remains of the Rev. Thomas Price*, 1854, I, 152. The identification of Glasgerion with the Welsh bard was afterwards made by Mr. Edward Williams in *The Cambrian Journal*, Sept., 1858, pp. 192-194 (see Child, *Ballads*, Part III, p. 137; Part IV, p. 571).

³ Our information is based on the title given to the poem by Shirley, which tells us that the balade in question was addressed to the prince and his brothers, Clarence, Bedford, and Gloucester, at a supper in the vintry in London at the house of Lewys Johan. See with regard to this poem and its author *Studies and Notes in Philology and Literature*, I, 109 ff.

Johan was a vintner, like Chaucer's father, and that he kept a restaurant, a fourteenth-century Sherry's, at which young men of the highest rank were accustomed to dine. The inference is in part established as a fact by the records of Parliament. In the Parliament of 1414, Thomas Chaucer, Esq., king's butler, Lewis Johan, and Johan Snypston presented a joint petition for payment of the sum of £868, 14 s., 3½d., for wine furnished to the late king, Henry IV. Of this sum 40 marks was due to Lewis Johan.¹

Thomas Chaucer, as is well known, was made chief butler of England for life by letters patent of Henry IV, dated Nov. 5, in the fourth year of that king's reign.²

We know further that Lewis Johan was a Freeman of the city of London in the second year of Henry IV, and that he was born of a Welsh father and mother. These facts are ascertained from a petition which he presented to Parliament in 1414, reciting them, and asking that the provisions of the statute of 2 Henry IV, providing that no Welshman be allowed to acquire lands or tenements in England or the English cities of Wales and that no Welshman be received as a burgess, etc., may not apply to him. The petition was granted, which seems to be sufficient evidence of the truth of the statements made therein.³

In 1414, Henry V granted to Lewis Johan the exclusive privilege for three years of issuing bills of exchange for persons wishing to send money to the Roman Curia, the republic of Venice, or other places where the Pope might be, or other parts beyond the sea. Lewis was to pay at each year's end 200 marks and was to be protected in his monopoly.⁴ In 1417 Lewis Johan was one of three sureties for the first payment of the ransom of the Count of Vendôme.⁵

¹ *Rot. Parl.*, iv, 37.

² The grant was confirmed in 1422 by Henry VI (*Rot. Parl.*, iv, 178).

³ *Statutes of the Realm*, II, 129. Passed in Jan., 1401.

⁴ *Patent Rolls*, 2 Henry V, p. 2, m. 23, Rymer, ed. Holmes, ix, 130.

⁵ *Proceedings of the Privy Council*, ed. Nicolas, II, 342. The other sureties were Johan Vyctor and Gerarde Davy, evidently persons in the same rank of life as Lewis Johan.

In 1422 Lewis Johan appeared before the Lords of the King's Council at Westminster and asked to be relieved of the office of Master of the Coinage in the tower of London.¹

From all these facts we can easily see what was the life and the station of Lewis Johan. He was a vintner, apparently well-known at court (like Chaucer's father), and he acquired sufficient wealth to engage in the business of banking. That he was personally known to Chaucer it seems impossible to doubt. It is not likely that any successful Londoner in Johan's business, and associated as he was with Scogan, Thomas Chaucer, and the court, should have been unknown to Geoffrey Chaucer. It would, of course, be an absurd *saltus* to jump to the conclusion that the poet must have heard of "the Bret Glascurion" from this Welsh acquaintance. We may believe as we list. In any case Lewis Johan remains an interesting figure, as one of the burgher and business circle to which Geoffrey Chaucer belonged as much as to the court, and with which he had such a minute and sympathetic acquaintance.

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¹ *Proceedings of the Privy Council*, II, 318.